NASA Glenn
**Plum Brook Station**

FIRST EDITION
OCTOBER 2001

# Decommissioning NEWS
## Plum Brook Station

**A quarterly newsletter to inform the public about NASA's Decommissioning Activities**

Welcome to the first edition of NASA's newsletter on the Decommissioning of the closed Reactor Facility at Plum Brook Station. We have created this newsletter to keep community members informed about our progress on decommissioning and to talk about topics that are of interest to the community.

We believe this publication will be an important means of staying in touch with you. Each edition will provide a brief update on the progress we've made and what our next steps will be. In this edition, we will introduce you to the NASA team that manages the project on a daily basis and to members of our Community Workgroup (see page three). We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions.

## NASA Successfully Prepares Facility for Decommissioning

This past summer was a busy one for members of the Decommissioning Team, as NASA undertook pre-decommissioning activities. In early June, NASA, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) staff and contractors went through a series of rigorous health and safety training programs. During June and July, doing work that could be performed under the terms of the existing license with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), highly trained crews from the team removed loose equipment from the "Hot Cells" area of the reactor, where experiments had been conducted during the facility's operational lifetime.

After surveying each cell before entering, the crews carefully removed material from the "Hot Cells" and surveyed it for radiation. Each item removed was inventoried, then packed in special containers and safely stored within the Reactor Facility until it was ready for shipping. All waste removed during pre-decommissioning was low-level, dry solid waste. On August 8, the crews placed the containers on one truck and again surveyed the contents before the truck departed for Alaron, a licensed reprocessing facility in Pennsylvania, where it arrived safely that evening. According to

*Continued on Page 2*

## WHAT'S INSIDE



## NAME OUR NEWSLETTER

In keeping with NASA's efforts to reach out to local schools, we're inviting students and their teachers to help us name this newsletter. If you have a name you think would be catchy, we would like to hear from you. The class and school submitting the winning name will be recognized by NASA and also mentioned in the next edition of the newsletter.
Please submit all entries to Sally Harrington in the Community and Media Relations Office at the NASA Glenn Research Center, via the 24-hour, toll-free Information Line at 1-800-260-3838, or you can reach her directly at 216-433-2037; or by E-mail at **s.harrington@grc.nasa.gov**

All entries must be submitted no later than Friday, December 14, 2001.

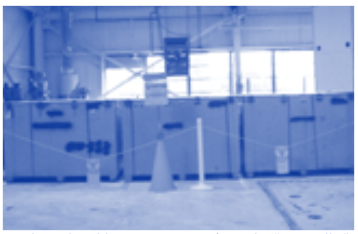
# Did you know?

NASA operated a 60-megawatt test reactor and a 100-kilowatt mock-up reactor at Plum Brook Station from 1961 to 1973, to study the effects of radiation on materials in space flight. When the Reactor Facility closed down in 1973, its fuel was safely removed and disposed of offsite. Since then, the facility has been in a safe, dry storage mode under NASA's license with the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). In 1998, the NRC asked NASA to proceed with decommissioning.

NASA has chosen the safest and most thorough alternative for decommissioning the Reactor Facility. Decommissioning will involve: removal and disposal of all radioactive components, equipment and materials; thoroughly decontaminating and removing all Reactor Facility buildings and structures to three feet below grade, and then backfilling the areas with clean fill. Our goal is to have decommissioning completed by 2007, at which time the area will be clean enough to use for any purpose.

*NASA Successfully Prepares Facility for Decommissioning (continued from page 1 )*

Tim Polich, NASA Decommissioning Project Manager, "The first shipment was removed and safely transported to its destination. We coordinated with the Erie County Emergency Management Agency and the Perkins Fire Department to ensure they were aware of the shipment. We will continue to work with public safety and health officials throughout the Decommissioning Project." Tim also pointed out that, "the safety of every shipment is just as important as the first one. We look forward to continuing this record of safety throughout the entire project."



Workers placed loose equipment from the "Hot Cells " in these special containers.

Worker surveys "Hot Cell " for radiation before entering.

Loaded truck leaves the Scheid Road gate at Plum Brook Station for the trip to Pennsylvania.

During the summer, NASA also conducted some analysis and characterization of materials that had been placed in the "hot dry storage" area of the facility. A camera was used to take remote pictures for the purposes of inspecting the area and inventorying the contents. Waste material from this area will be carefully packaged in a special cask and safely shipped by truck to a licensed disposal facility, as part of the actual decommissioning work. Additional work during pre-decommissioning involved restoring cranes and other systems for use during decommissioning.

Tim said that pre-decommissioning gave NASA its first opportunity to "work through our plans and procedures, which will help us ensure the safe and successful decommissioning of the Reactor Facility." NASA is anticipating that decommissioning will begin late this fall after we receive approval of our Decommissioning Plan from the NRC. ■

## NASA Decommissioning Team

As the license holder, NASA is fully responsible for all aspects of decommissioning. Because decommissioning requires a wide variety of expertise, NASA has assembled a team of experts to work on this project. The team includes a federal partnership which joins NASA with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Argonne National Laboratories (US Department of Energy). USACE has demonstrated expertise in the management of large construction projects and decommissioning is, essentially, "construction in reverse." Argonne brings to the table a long-standing expertise in nuclear health and safety issues.

USACE has access to a large group of pre-qualified contractors who specialize in large-scale cleanup projects. For this project, USACE brought in Montgomery Watson Harza (MWH), a California contractor that has worked with USACE on a number of large-scale projects. The Project Team also includes Duke Engineering & Services of North Carolina and MOTA Corporation of South Carolina. Both subcontractors have expertise in addressing the radiological elements of the project.

Tim Polich, NASA Decommissioning Project Manager, joined the team in 1999 after serving with the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Tim is supported by a large staff of professionals skilled in several scientific and technical areas that includes Senior Project Engineer Keith Peecook, a longtime NASA Plum Brook Station staff member and area resident. Wes Watson serves as USACE Resident Manager for the project.

According to Tim Polich, "This team brings together people who have proven expertise and a commitment to safety - our number one priority. I'm excited about the direction in which we're going, one that will lead to a safe and successful decommissioning." ■

## Decommissioning INFORMATION LINE

In July, NASA established a 24-hour, toll-free Information Line for the Decommissioning Project. Call 1-800-260-3838 for updates or an overview of the project, to request fact sheets or to be added to our mailing list. You can also leave comments or questions on the line or leave a message for a member of our Decommissioning Team. We check the Information Line daily and are committed to responding to any requests or questions you might have. The Information Line is one more way that NASA is working with the community to ensure a safe and successful Decommissioning Project. ■

**Do you want some news?**
**Do you have questions or comments on decommissioning?**

**Call our Information Line at 1-800-260-3838.**

**Community Information Session**
**Perkins High School**
**Tuesday, October 23**
**7:30 PM – 9 PM**

## Community Workgroup

In October 1999, NASA established a Community Workgroup for the Decommissioning Project. The Workgroup serves as a vehicle by which NASA communicates information on Decommissioning while providing Workgroup members and the larger community an opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, and provide input and suggestions. The Workgroup currently consists of 14 members; residents of Erie County who represent a variety of constituencies including nearby neighbors of Plum Brook Station, public safety officials, health and education professionals and members of the area's environmental community. Workgroup members are active in many aspects of community life and are expected to provide project information to their constituencies, neighbors and members of the larger community.

Workgroup meetings have been held quarterly since November 1999 and may be held more frequently as Decommissioning activity increases. Initially, meetings were held at BGSU Firelands. More recently, in an effort to reach more members of the community throughout Erie County, meetings have been held at the EHOVE Career Center in Milan and at Perkins High School. All Workgroup meetings are open to the public and are advertised in area newspapers and through Public Service Announcements on local radio stations. ■

NASA is grateful to BGSU Firelands for its long established generosity in providing meeting space for both the Workgroup and Community Information Sessions and for enabling NASA to establish its Community Information Bank in the College library. We also appreciate the hospitality shown us by the EHOVE Career Center and Perkins High School.

NASA is committed to holding Workgroup meetings at locations throughout Erie County. If you have an idea for a workgroup meeting location in your community, please contact us on our 24-hour, toll-free Information Line at 1-800-260-3838.

## Monitoring for Safety

Monitoring is an important part of our safety plans and procedures to protect workers, the public and the environment. In fact, sampling the air, water and sediment around the Reactor Facility has always been part of NASA's oversight of the facility, both while it was in operation and since it was closed. In preparation for decommissioning, NASA has stepped up its monitoring program. Last spring, we began continuous environmental air monitoring at six locations, both inside and outside the 27-acre Reactor Facility fence line and within Plum Brook Station. The air samples are taken continuously and are analyzed onsite each week. We've also brought in an outside laboratory (GEL Laboratories, in Atlanta, Georgia) to analyze monthly silt and surface water sampling results.

Air monitoring station outside fence, near south gate of Reactor Facility.

Indoor monitoring device for decommissioning workers is adjacent to the Reactor Facility

While there has been continuous monitoring since the Reactor Facility closed in 1973, the more comprehensive monitoring will support activity during decommissioning. The first round of samples taken this spring was used to establish a "baseline," or reference point, against which we can monitor activities throughout decommissioning.

According to Keith Peecook, NASA Senior Project Engineer, "Monitoring is going well. We've been getting a good amount of data to give us a solid baseline." We are happy to report that, as expected, test results show that levels are consistent with area background levels.

NASA has also been working to ensure that we take great care to monitor on-site workers at the Reactor Facility. All workers pass through a pair of monitors at the start and end of the workday; we also monitor their lunchboxes and hand-held tools and equipment. We have also issued all workers personal dosimeters, known as "film badges," and we measure them for monthly and cumulative exposure to the low-level radiation in the Reactor Facility. ■

# Meet

## John Blakeman

**From time to time, this newsletter will introduce you to members of our Workgroup. In this edition, we talk with John Blakeman.**

If the issue is the environment in Erie County, chances are that John Blakeman is somehow involved. The rural Huron resident has been a mainstay of the Decommissioning Community Workgroup since its first meeting and brings over 30 years of experience in environmental and scientific areas. Retired last year after serving the Perkins Public Schools for 30 years as a science teacher, including 17 at Perkins High School (where he received the 1988 Ohio Outstanding Biology Teacher Award from the National Association of Biology Teachers), John now heads his own firm, Meadow Environments LLC, offering an array of services to landowners, designers and contractors.

John is quick to donate his time not only to NASA but also to a variety of organizations. In conjunction with Erie MetroParks, he leads driving tours of prairie sites within NASA Plum Brook Station and, as president of the Friends of Edison Woods, he spearheaded the successful drive for public ownership of the preserve. He is also a member of the Restoration Advisory Board for the former Ordnance Facility that once operated at what is now Plum Brook Station.

John views the Workgroup as "an important two-way connection," between NASA and local citizens and organizations, and as "a real people to people component" of NASA's efforts to communicate information on the Decommissioning Project. He believes his training in the sciences and his teaching experience enable him to "explain technical aspects and project details to bring public understanding of issues and concerns." John is equally forthcoming in expressing his view of what the Workgroup is not, stating, "We don't sit through frequent meetings to be public relations agents for NASA. We represent local citizens in the monitoring of public safety."

*Continued on Page 4*

**VISIT US ON-LINE**
You can find our Decommissioning Website at www.grc.nasa.gov/www/pbrf

## Topics in Upcoming Issue

Decommissioning Update
NASA Holds Community Information Session
Historical Significance of the Reactor Facility

## NASA to Hold Community Information Session on October 23

NASA will hold its third annual Community Information Session in the Perkins High School cafeteria on Tuesday, October 23 (7:30 PM - 9 PM). Community Information Sessions give members of the public some "up close and personal" contact with members of NASA's Decommissioning Team. Visitors will have an opportunity to tour a series of text and visual displays and ask questions of NASA personnel and contractors staffing the displays. NASA will also provide visitors with a narrated slide presentation and a video on the project that will run continuously throughout the Information Session.

Our Community Information Sessions are advertised in local newspapers and via Public Service Announcements on area radio stations. As the project goes on, NASA will hold additional Community Information Sessions in locations throughout Erie County. ■

## Other Ways That We Bring Decommissioning Information to You

We hope this newsletter and its contents give you an idea of NASA's commitment to safety and to providing you with the best information available on the Decommissioning Project. Here are some other ways that we're sharing information with you.

FACT SHEETS Since June 1999, NASA has produced six fact sheets dealing with various aspects of NASA's plans for Decommissioning. Copies are available at public libraries throughout Erie County, at the Community Information Bank at the BGSU Firelands Library, on our Decommissioning Website at www.grc.nasa.gov/www/pbrf and by calling our Information Line at 1-800-260-3838.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION BANK NASA has established a Community Information Bank (CIB) at the BGSU Firelands Library. The CIB serves as a permanent repository of information on the Decommissioning Project. NASA continually updates the information in the CIB, which includes fact sheets, Public Service Announcements about NASA events, copies of NASA's Decommissioning Plan and Decommissioning Community Relations Plan, articles on the project, minutes from Community Workgroup meetings, and copies of other decommissioning-related documents and reports. All information at the CIB is available to the public upon request.

DECOMMISSIONING WEBSITE Decommissioning information is also available on-line. Visit us at www.grc.nasa.gov/www/pbrf

SPEAKERS Pending the availability of staff, NASA will provide speakers upon request to civic, community and school organizations throughout Decommissioning. A video or slide presentation may be presented. For further information, contact Sally Harrington through our Information Line at 1-800-260-3838, her direct line at 216-433-2037, or at s.harrington@grc.nasa.gov. ■

*John Blakeman (continued from page 3)*

According to the longtime environmentalist, "Every matter regarding the project is open to public scrutiny. NASA is not trying to sneak anything under the fence." Instead, he says, NASA's Decommissioning Outreach efforts "actively involve the public in a good government, best practices manner." If you have a question for John, he invites you to contact him at jablakeman@aol.com. ■

NASA Glenn
**Plum Brook Station**
6100 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, Ohio 44870

**Community Information Session**
**Perkins High School**
**Tuesday**
**OCTOBER 23**